## Number 6 - June 2017 **AFS Publication - Volume**

### The June AFS Meeting

### Lecia Brooks of the Southern Poverty Law Center



Lecia Brooks

Lecia Brooks leads the Southern Poverty Law Center's outreach efforts on key initiatives and social justice issues. As outreach director, she frequently gives presentations around the country to promote tolerance and diversity. She also serves as director of the Civil Rights

Memorial Center in Montgomery, AL, an interpretive center designed to provide visitors to the Civil Rights Memorial with a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement. She joined the SPLC staff in 2004 as director of Mix It Up at Lunch Day, a Teaching Tolerance program designed to help break down racial, cultural and social barriers in schools. Previously, she worked for I2 years in a number of capacities for the National Conference for Community and Justice in its Los Angeles office. She is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University.

The SPLC is dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. Using litigation, education, and other forms of advocacy, the SPLC works toward the day when the ideals of equal justice and equal opportunity will be a reality.

Civil rights lawyers **Morris Dees** and **Joseph Levin Jr.** founded the SPLC in 1971 to ensure that the promise of the civil rights movement became a reality for all. Since then, they've won



numerous landmark legal victories on behalf of the exploited, the powerless and the forgotten.

Their lawsuits have toppled institutional racism and stamped out remnants of Jim Crow segregation; destroyed some of the nation's most violent white supremacist groups; and protected the civil rights of children, women, the disabled, immigrants and migrant workers, the LGBT community, prisoners, and many others who faced discrimination, abuse or exploitation.

Their Intelligence Project is internationally

### Calendar

6/II AFS Board Meeting II:00 am

6/11 AFS General Meeting 1:00 pm 6/11 Game afternoon after meeting

7/9 Potluck 12:00 pm

7/9 AFS General Meeting

7/9 Game afternoon after meeting

All events are at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.

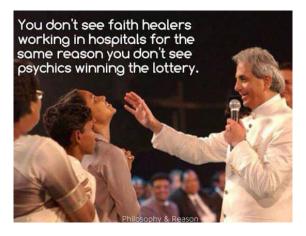
Be sure to like AFS's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought

known for tracking and exposing the activities of hate groups and other domestic extremists.

Their **Teaching Tolerance** program produces and distributes – free of charge – anti-bias documentary films, books, lesson plans and other materials that reduce prejudice and promote educational equity in our nation's schools.

They also built and maintain the Civil Rights Memorial and its interpretive center, the Civil Rights Memorial Center, in Montgomery, AL, the birthplace of the modern civil rights movement.

They're based in Montgomery and have offices in Atlanta, Miami, New Orleans, and Jackson, MS.





### **Programs and Speakers**

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

A SOCIETY SOCIETY

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

Jun II: Lecia Brooks from the SPLC

July 9: TBD Aug 13: TBD Sept 10: TBD Oct 8: TBD

### **AFS Email List**

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calender information on AFS activities, please join the Meetup group. The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org.

To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friend-ships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

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### Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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### **Atlanta Freethought News**

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### Melvin Fein—Ideological Example Par Excellence

By Ed Buckner

Marietta Daily Journal May 16, 2017

Dear Editor,

Melvin Fein ("Ideology versus Principles," MDJ, 15 May) has unintentionally provided a near perfect example of writing that is ideological while pretending to be principled. The whole column offers absurd claims rooted in his knee-jerk opposition, false on its face, to all liberal ideas. He repeatedly makes assertions about "liberals" that have nothing in common with the way liberals actually think and everything to do with how ideological conservatives perceive liberals. This can most readily be seen by taking some of his statements and merely substituting the word "conservative" where he used the word "liberal":

"Conservatives are ideologues. They have a simplified view of what the world is and should be."

"Conservatives have few ethical standards because they assume... ."

"Conservatives do not believe in honesty, or personal responsibility, or elementary fairness, or family commitments, or individual liberty."

"We currently see what happens when principles are absent. People engage in riots, vulgarly insult their foes and misrepresent facts. Moreover, they do so with a clear conscience. Like contemporary conservatives, they are selfcongratulatory, even as they slander others."

Of course both liberal and conservative ideas can be criticized, but a serious, principled columnist would base his analysis on true statements, not absurdly ideological lies.

Ed Buckner, Smyrna, GA

Following is Melvyn Fein's column to which Ed Buckner was referring.

### **Ideology Versus Principles**

By Melvyn Fein • Marietta Daily Journal May 15, 2017

Liberals are ideologues. They have a simplified view of what the world is and should be. As they see it, if we were all nice to each other and treated each other as complete equals, the government, which they will control, would provide everything we need in order to be happy.

As "progressives," they consider it inevitable that a compassionate bureaucracy will one day furnish everyone with free health care, free higher education and comfortable living conditions, without anyone having to work for these. Much as King Henry VIII of England once looted the monasteries to finance his lavish lifestyle, they will take from the rich to give to the poor. The problem is that in order to realize this fairytale, they have had to jettison their moral principles. Liberals have few ethical standards because they assume their limitless kindness makes canons of decency unnecessary. Thanks to their unparalleled intelligence and good intentions, they will always do what's best.

Liberals tell us that we must be non-judgmental and they are as good as their word. They have, in fact, abandoned all pretenses of reasonable judgment. When it comes to distinguishing right from wrong, they can no longer tell the difference.

Liberals do not believe in honesty, or personal responsibility, or elementary fairness, or family commitments, or individual liberty. Although they sometimes pay verbal deference to these values, their actions reveal an underlying conviction that these are outmoded. Thus the left-wing idealists, who dominate the mainstream press, consider it their duty to distort what conservatives believe. They would rather cut off a right arm than give Donald Trump credit for anything. To this end, they omit information that might cast him in a favorable light and egregiously misread the import of his policies. By the same token, political agitators campaign against public safety. They do not believe it is the government's responsibility to protect its citizens or theirs to respect the free speech of those with whom they disagree. Others may have such duties, but they have only rights. As for fairness, they routinely condemn double standards when these are applied to them, but eagerly use them against their foes. Hence Trump is vilified for his alleged exploitation of women, whereas we were asked to "move on" with respect to Bill Clinton's sexual misdeeds. Meanwhile, liberal feminists disparage the family. Men are portrayed as serial rapists; while women are assured that they do not need to marry and will not benefit from the assistance of a husband. Children, of course, are depicted as dead weight that prevent women from realizing their potential.

Finally, liberty is dismissed as a rationalization for exploitation. Liberals believe that a multitude of statutes must prohibit people from making dire mistakes. Only government experts are capable of determining how many carbonated drinks people should be allowed or whether a mud puddle on a family farm endangers planetary climate.

What liberals fail to understand is that when they undermine basic moral principles, they also undermine their ability to deliver the benefits they promise. No large-scale society can function without broadly held, and consistently enforced, interpersonal rules

We humans are a contentious species. We want what we want when we want it. We are also a dangerous species. We — all of us — are capable of injuring others. Given the availability of the proper weapons, no one is invariably safe from anyone else.

These hazards are magnified in massive communities where millions of strangers need to cooperate if they are to prosper. People, who depend upon each other, but do not know one another, must be constrained by internalized principles. Love is not enough to render them selfless when they are not bound by personal attachments.

Ideological fairytales are no substitute for a conscience or shared commitments. Visions of what would happen if we were a different sort of creature, cannot constrain people if they do not possess internal limitations.

We currently see what happens when principles are absent. People engage in riots, vulgarly insult their foes and misrepresent facts. Moreover, they do so with a clear conscience. Like contemporary liberals, they are self-congratulatory, even as they slander others.

Melvyn L. Fein, Ph.D. is a professor of sociology at Kennesaw State University.

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### **AHA Applauds Resolution Opposing Blasphemy Laws**

americanhumanist.org

The American Humanist Association (AHA) welcomes the introduction of H.Res. 349, designed to protect religious and secular minorities by encouraging the repeal of blasphemy laws around the world. Blasphemy laws put thousands of lives at risk, with too many offenders serving long jail sentences or being executed for "insulting" a specific religion.

The American Humanist Association worked with Reps. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Alex Mooney (R-WV), David Cicilline (D-RI), and John Culberson (R-TX) to reintroduce the legislation, which calls for a repeal of blasphemy laws worldwide. The legislation, which was introduced in the last session of Congress by Reps. Joseph Pitts (R-PA) and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), encouraged the President and the State Department to make the worldwide repeal of these laws a priority, while also opposing any attempts at the United Nations to support blasphemy laws.

In many countries, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, nontheists, and other religious minorities are imprisoned, tortured, sentenced to death, and executed for blasphemy offenses. The resolution urges countries that still maintain such laws to "amend or repeal such laws, as they provide a pretext and impunity for vigilante violence against religious minorities."

"This resolution is a step forward toward better protecting theists and nontheists alike," said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. "The freedom to believe or not believe is a fundamental human right that is being infringed upon around the world, and this resolution goes a long way to ensure that these individuals have their rights restored."

"Blasphemy laws target marginalized religious minorities and leave them vulnerable to attacks and imprisonment," said Matthew Bulger, legislative director of the American Humanist Association. "This resolution can help end the unnecessary threat to religious freedom and basic human dignity that blasphemy laws pose."

The full Resolution can be found here.

### David Barton Doesn't Understand That The Declaration Of Independence And The Constitution Are Two Very Different Documents

### Rob Boston in Wall of Separation

www.au.org

Religious Right pseudo-historian David Barton is back with another mind-bogglingly silly argument that the United States is really an officially Christian nation – even though our Constitution doesn't say that.

Barton's latest line is that there was no need

atus design

Pseudo-historian David Barton

to mention God in the Constitution because the deity had already been singled out in the Declaration of Independence.

"They didn't feel like they had to say anything in the Constitution because they've already said it really strongly in the Declaration," Barton said on his radio show recently. "Why repeat it? Because this is just

the completion of the Declaration, if you will."

Barton fundamentally misunderstands the nature of these two documents. The Declaration is an announcement to the world – think of it as a kind of really big press release – making it clear that the United States was severing its ties to Great Britain. At the time the Declaration was issued,

the Revolution was already under way, and the new nation wanted to explain to other countries why it had taken this dramatic step, likely hoping to win their support.

The Declaration, therefore, lists America's grievances with England and makes it clear we're going our own way. It says nothing about the structure of the new U.S. government because that wasn't its purpose. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration in one day, and it was reviewed and edited by several members of the Continental Congress before being signed and issued.

The Constitution, on the other hand, is a true governance document. Drafted years after the Revolution (primarily by James Madison), it's much longer and goes into great detail about the structure of the new U.S. government. The Constitutional Convention ran from May 25 – Sept. 17, 1787. During that time, the document underwent many changes and revisions; this was a much more deliberative process. Even then, the document was incomplete: In 1791, the Bill of Rights (also written by Madison) was added.

Barton's argument that there was some sort of straight line between the Declaration and the Constitution is nonsensical. He seems to forget that there was an interim document, the Articles of Confederation, that held the new government together for a few years but in the end proved to be ineffective.

Also, let's consider the religious references in the Declaration. There are four of them – "Creator," "Divine Providence," "Supreme Judge of the World" and "Nature's God." These Deistic terms appear nowhere in the Constitution, but if they did, they would have hardly provided a foundation for a Christian nation.

Continued on page 5

### **Trump Administration's Attack On Women's Health And Equality Escalates**

### Wall of Separation

www.au.org

In early May, President Donald J. Trump fulfilled a campaign promise by signing an executive order that was aimed at allowing bosses and universities to use religion as an excuse to deny their employees and students insurance coverage for contraception.

Within hours, Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price promised to take action "in short order" to carry out Trump's directive. And less than a month later. The New York Times has now confirmed that federal officials are finalizing a new regulation to do so.

Religious freedom is a fundamental American value. It gives us all the right to believe - or not - as we see fit. But it doesn't give anyone the right to harm or discriminate against others. Denying women access to contracep-

tion in the name of religion is discrimination,

plain and simple.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA, also known as Obamacare) includes a provision that requires most employers and universities to provide health-insurance plans that cover birth control with no co-pay. This policy was adopted to improve access to birth control, which is vital to women's health and equality. Nonetheless, many religiously affiliated institutions (including some prominent universities) and owners of for-profit corporations argued that the policy violates their religious freedom.

In response, the government created an accommodation for non-profits with religious objections (and since expanded it to for-profit companies following the U.S. Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision). Under this accommodation, non-profit organizations need only complete a short form to opt out of providing contraception

coverage, and the government will work with third-party insurance companies to provide the coverage at no cost to affected women. Yet attacks on contraception coverage persist as some non-profits argue that even having to request the opt-out violates their religious freedom.

Their objections were voiced in a series of cases filed throughout the country, which eventually made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court. A year ago, the high court essentially took a pass on dealing with the important question of access to birth control and sent the cases back down to the lower courts, where they have languished ever since.

On June 1st, the federal government has to update a federal appeals court in one of these cases, University of Notre Dame v. Price - and now it seems like it has something to report. According to The Times, the new rule, which would go into effect immediately, is expected to "roll back" the coverage requirement, potentially leaving countless women without access to birth control.

Americans United also has to provide an update to the court in this case on behalf of the Notre Dame students we represent. They are the only



women whose coverage is at risk who are actual parties to one of these cases. The Trump administration's new rule could cause serious harm. But we will continue to fight for our clients and others like them to ensure that their bosses and their universities can't deny them access to birth control under the guise of religious freedom.

Check out Americans United's work on ensuring religion is not an excuse to harm others at Protect Thy Neighbor project.

### Continued from page 4

Barton also ignores the sections of the Constitution that clash with his kooky theory - like the First Amendment. It bans laws "respecting an establishment" of religion and guarantees the freedom to choose your own religion - any religion, not just Christianity. Language in Article VI also bars "religious tests" for public office. Although often overlooked, that provision is very telling.

An officially "Christian nation" would not have gone out of its way to make it clear that federal offices would be open to everyone, no matter what they believed about religion.

Here's the bottom line: Had an officially Christian nation been the intent of the Founders, the Constitution would say that front and center. It does not. In fact, its language cuts the other way.

That really is the end of the debate, and, as usual, Barton is on the losing side.

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### Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donnajgore@yahoo.com.

We Agnostics Atlanta meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Galano Club, 585 Dutch Valley Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30324. Clubhouse phone number: (404) 881-9188. This is like an Alcoholics Anonymous group.

Gainesville Atheists are now having weekly meetups on Sundays at 3:00 p.m. at Lake Lanier Club Business Center, 2350 Avonlea Way, Gainesville to discuss the historicity of Jesus. They are also doing outreach to University of North Georgia - Gainesville. (www.meetup.com/ Secular-Atheist-Study-the-Scriptures-SASS-Gainesville)

Post-Christian Church of SHATTER meets every Sunday at 5:00 pm at 1371 Hartvord Ave SW, Atlanta. This is a new group so check out the website to find out what to expect and be sure to RSVP: www.churchofshatter.com/sunday-service (www.meetup.com/Post-Christian-Church-of-SHATTER)

Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meetup has various get-to-

gethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. (www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup)

The Peachtree City Human-

ists participate in social and educational activities such as dinners, lunches, coffees, outdoor recreation, discussion groups, and book clubs with topics that include science, psychology, philosophy. (www.meetup.com/ Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH)

The Southern Crescent Freethinkers sponsor Navigators, Owl & Ibis: A Confluence of Minds, and meet for dinner, etc. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/ Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers)

### N. Georgia Freethinkers Secularists & Humanists Non-religious

freethinking adults, who at times feel somewhat isolated in this little corner of Georgia, meet for drinks, to forge friendships, have dinner parties, chat over coffee, practice debating skills, laugh, hold game nights, etc. (www.meetup.com/North-Gwinnett-Freethinkers-Atheist-Agnostic-Meetup)

**Atlanta Astronomy Club** is not having meetings during the summer months. Check website for more info. (www.atlanta-astronomy.org)

**Freedom From Religion Foundation of Georgia** does not have any events planned at press time so please check Meetup or Facebook. (www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia)

**The Atlanta Science Tavern** has several meetings planned. Please check meetup page for more information. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

**Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter** meets on Sat, Jun 10 at 1 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Booksellers

Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit www.recoveringfromreligion.org. (www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** Sun., Jun II at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

### **GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths)**

meets on the Mon Jun 12 at 7:00 pm at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, unless otherwise indicated. Check Facebook/Meetup pages for more information. (www.meetup.com/brights-295)

Atlanta Atheists will have a third Sunday meetup at Rosati's Pizza and Sports Pub, 4629 Wieuca Road NE, Atlanta on Sun, Jun 18 at 2:00. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

**Black Nonbelievers** is having a general meeting Sun, Jun 18, location and time not determined at presstime, so check Meetup and Facebook for more info. (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

### Sunday Assembly Atlanta will

have a general meeting on Sun Jun 18 at 6 p.m. at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. At press time the topic is in the planning stages. Assemblies, and the potlucks afterward, are open to the public and free to attend. SAA is an extremely active community with a large number of upcoming events including rock chorus, secular support, mindfulness meditation, wonder club, urban wonder, book club, makers night out, volunteering, queer beyond belief group, public speaking series, trivia nights, etc. (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly)

**Ethical Humanists of Atlanta** is meeting Sun, Jun 25 12:30-2:00 p.m. at Manuel's Tavern, 603 N Highland Ave NE, Atlanta to have a conversation on

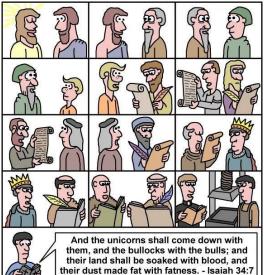
ethical living. They meet every 4th Sunday. (www.meetup.com/ Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta)

Another **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** is scheduled for Sun., Jun 25 at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Atlanta Skeptics has "Drinking Skeptically" on the first Friday of each month. 5 Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

Atlanta Atheists has first Sunday meetups each month: the place varies. Check Meetup for info on the get-together. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

**Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. There are meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. (www.fellowshipofreason.com)



## Become a Member!

# (Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

as the social and activist events that we sponsor! voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the Atlanta Freethought News, If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought

**Individual memberships:** One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

**Life memberships:** Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.

and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.) Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

### Annual dues are:

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### **AFS Art Display Program**

www.atlantafreethought.org 4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339 afs@atlantafreethought.org

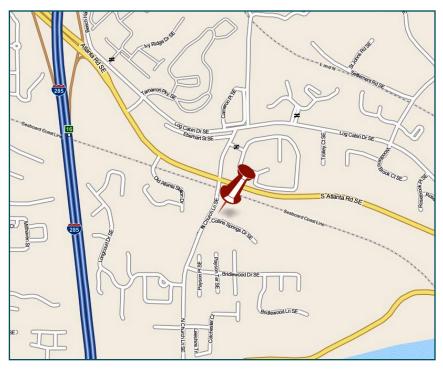
Person or entity displaying art:

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Description of artwork (subject, color, dimensions, weight, frame, price, materials, other info — list on separate page if necessary):
Display dates: from to to
Address:
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ls artwork for sale? Yes / No \$Upon sale owner agrees to pay AFS a 33.3% fee.
Terms: All artwork displays will be submitted to Atlanta Freethought Society art committee for approval (afs@atlantaf-reethought.org). Installation & removal will be done by artist/owner overseen by AFS art committee. Damage to building will be repaired by artist/owner. The owner assumes all risk for artwork at all times. AFS will not be responsible for any damage or loss while artwork is in our posession.
Owner agrees to terms: Signature/date



June 11th meeting 1:00 at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339

### **Lecia Brooks**



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